

Heather A. Coletti - Biologist



United States Geological Survey (USGS)
1011 E Tudor Rd. Anchorage, AK 99503
Phone: 907-786-3937
Email: hcoletti@usgs.gov

Overview of your job: Currently, I am a biologist for the US Geological Survey in Anchorage, AK working with the sea otter project. I have been with the project for over 6 years. A large portion of my time is spent working on a nearshore monitoring project with the National Park Service Southwest Alaska Network of Parks (SWAN). We study various aspects of the nearshore to compile and analyze data that may be useful to describe changes in ecosystems over time and try to promote an understanding of the causes of those changes. I also work on population modeling with sea otters to better understand their use of the nearshore through the use of GIS (Geographic Information Systems) and survey data. We are continuing work on the effects of lingering oil not only in sea otters but other species still affected by the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill of 1989. We are currently conducting studies in the eastern portion of the sea otter range to help determine the causes of the sea otter decline, which was cause for the listing of the sea otter as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Educational Background or Degree:

BS in Zoology from the University of Rhode Island

MS in Natural Resources: Environmental Conservation from the University of New Hampshire

High school course work you would recommend to students:

If they're interested in science, take as many science and math classes as possible in HS. However, college also offers endless opportunities to explore some interesting subjects. Make an effort to talk to your teachers and professors early on in your schooling. Let them know what you think you may be interested in and if they have suggestions / advice for you. Also, get out there and volunteer for different projects you find interesting! It's the best way to decide if the subjects you are pursuing are the right ones for you.

Is there a person or event that influenced you in choosing this career?

No, I've always loved the ocean and have always had an interest in science. I used to teach SCUBA diving and realized just being in the ocean wasn't enough. I really wanted to understand various aspects of the ocean.

Are there positive or negative things that have shaped your personal and/or career choices?

I've had several negative experiences that have shaped my personal and career choices. The negative aspects are always what we remember the most. I've had wonderful professors, especially in graduate school, as well as professional support, but, unfortunately, I had my share of unsupportive teachers and professors that left a mark, but also made me push myself a little harder.

Do you have any advice for students?

Don't be afraid to try something new. Don't be afraid to go to a new place. Don't be afraid to talk to your teachers and advisors. Especially when attending college, remember that you are smart enough to be there and deserve to be there just like everyone else. Don't let a negative experience keep you from pursuing your goals. It just makes you appreciate your accomplishments that much more.

May students contact you after the conference? Yes